Research Proposal

ROCK-CUT ARCHITECTURE IN WESTERN DECCAN: A STUDY FROM SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

(2nd century BCE to 9th century CE)

UNDER THE SUPERVISION

OF

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Title of the topic :(Tentative)

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Introduction:

It is widely held that art, by and large, has served as the landmark of religion in pre modern India. Religion though has been a very important factor behind the creation of most of art and architecture in Early India, it would be an injustice to the genius of the artists and the generosity of the donors, if we interpret all architecture in light of religious beliefs & sects. So convinced with the link between religion and art that scholars tend to see even in a 'secular' structure like the Great Bath in Mahenjodaro the role of religion even though no structure that can be identified as 'religious' or 'sacred' has been unearthed so far. The earliest architecture used for worshipping, or associated with religion is Stupa. Stupa, that became the architectural symbol of the Buddha and his teachings, might be unknown in the pre- Buddhist antiquity. But philogically at least, the word stūpa was not unknown in the Vedic antiquity. In Rig-Veda, Atharva Veda, the Taittriya Samhita, the Vajasaneyi Samhita, and the Satapatha Brahmana the word stupa occurs though it refers to a 'bunch of wool' or 'raised lock of hair' or 'the forepart of the head'. However, the Pali word 'thupa' is the nearest equivalent of the term 'stūpa'. Thupa means a 'conical heap', 'a pile' or 'a mound' or a conical or bell shaped shrine containing a relic (Pant, 1976) In later period this stupa was enshrined within a pillared hall known as Chaitya griha. Gradually Vihara emerged as the residence of monks, another form of rock-cut architecture.

Architecture made for worshipping, or made by worshippers always played a critical role in the history of India. The earliest sacred building / structure, or the place where the sacred idol/symbol was placed and worshipped is the rock-cut monuments. The earliest rock-cut temples are found in Barabar Hills, patronized by Asoka for the Ajivikas. Prior to that there was Son Bhandar cave near Rajagriha which is believed to be the earliest and dated back to the 6th century B.C. but it does not bear the typical cave temple style which is common from the Barabar groups. This tradition of cut in architecture continued, until the emergence of structural stone architecture in the early part of the first millennium. It wouldn't

be unfair to suggest that the making of architectural monuments for religious purpose was a prestigious issue, or the declaration of power and pride of the patron.

In the history of Indian sacred architecture there are two dominant forms. Rock-cut monuments that include monuments both cut into or on of a living rock and structural monuments erected by relatively more durable materials like brick or stone. Here the word sacred denotes a place of worship which in different religions are called differently such as Synagogue, temple, mosque, church and so on. In most cases the central object is the symbol, image, or the idol of the God according to doctrine. There was also a trend of following the existing religious architectural pattern with new ornamentation with sculptural and sometimes architectural annexation, and in most cases strongly influenced by regional variation, to differentiate their creation with earlier one. It continues till some king or ruler patronized religious architecture and really took an active interest in their artistic representation, as did the Pallava king Rajasimha. His ancestor Mahendravarman build cave temple at Mandagappattu which was then a dominant style in Deccan region. But Rajasimha made an excellent effort to experiment with different temple style and finally culminated in Kailashnath temple of Kanchipuram, a beautiful example of Dravida style temple. This style then continued for many centuries with regional and ornamental variations. However, in case of India cave architecture for religious purpose was not completely unknown. But in most cases they were excavated/ donated for living of certain ascetic groups like Caves in Barabar hills by Asoka for Ajivikas and Udaygiri and Khandagiri by King Kharvela for Jain etc. This cave architecture becomes dominant in association with Buddhism. Even the stupa architecture also evolved into an ornamented religious architecture in time and its beautiful culmination can be imagined from the relief of the Amaravati stupa. Religious architecture associated with Buddhism is scattered throughout India but the cave temples associated with Buddhism are mostly concentrated in the western Deccan region. The interesting part is in case of western Deccan this architecture cannot be labelled as Buddhist architecture only because this mode of architecture continued for a thousand years also under the influence of other religions like Jainism and Brahmanism.

James Fergusson and James Burgess in ‘The Cave Temples of India’ complimented the Rock cut caves of western India by stating that if those caves didn’t exist, the other cave temples in India wouldn’t attract European historians. The rock-cut caves of Deccan have always caught the attention of Art historians, archaeologist and historians to rethink and

reinterpret their importance in the society from different perspectives. The distribution of the caves, their methods, techniques, sculptural, religious importance and the fact that they are not only confined in a typical structure of particular religion has always raised questions and controversy regarding their making, and the patronage of these caves. The presence of numerous beautiful colossal rock-cut caves carved mainly in this western Deccan region is also another reason for this growing controversy. There are many theories and opinion about the rock-cut caves in relation with royal patronage, trade, architecture, religious importance and so on. Though most of the studies were done on the basis of Buddhist monuments the interesting fact is same type of monuments continue even when the religious belief or patronage changed into other. It is true indeed, that this type of structures started in Mauryan period and also moved in western Deccan with the growing distribution of Buddhism by Asoka. The interesting fact is, they might have started it as the religious architecture of Buddhist sect but this continues even with Brahamanical and Jain sects of beliefs. Earlier studies in this field are mostly seen through the lenses of religion. Yet considering the multi religious approach in same sites like Ellora and also the distribution of all these caves in western Deccan regions for about 1000 years, an approach through the social dimension of these caves irrespective of religious beliefs is required. Nowadays there are renowned scholars who are contributing in different aspects in relation to these caves like Walter Spink, Himanshu Prabha Ray, Kathleen D. Morrison and Vidya Dehejia etal. But most of their studies are concerned with a site of group of cave temples in western Deccan. In spite of enormous study in this field, special focus on the social dimension of these caves together will throw a new light to understand the relation of them with contemporary society, politics and more importantly religion.

Rock cut caves or the 'Rock – cut Sanctuaries', as suggested by Benjamin Rowland, is believed to be the residing place for Buddhist monk (Rowland, 1953). There are mainly two types of architecture- Chaitya and Vihara. Chaitya halls and 'sangharamas', the place for worshipping, contains a Stupa in it. Viharas are the chambered halls for residing of the monks. Most of the Rock cut caves, as mentioned above, are situated in the Deccan area and are distributed in cluster form. It is believed that as the number of monks increased new caves were cut nearby and that is how they grew in number.

There are nearly 1200 rock-cut caves in India among them 1000 are located in western India. This region is dominated by the Sahyadri hill ranges. The basalt rock of this

region is ideal for carving. Though the Sahyadri hills lies in north –south axis it has sub ranges running mostly west-east. Rock –cut architecture has been excavated in the main range and in the sub ranges as well. Developments of the Rock-cut architecture flourished mostly in the time of Satavahana period. They also enjoyed the patronage of Kshatrapa rulers as well, who was arch- rival of the Satavahanas. Western Deccan, an isolated part of India, suddenly flourished in this period and became an important place for both trade and monastic development, ideologically two opposite phenomena, also indicates the relation of state, polity and religious activity of this period. In spite of several different explanations and different theories, these colossal rock-cut caves still raise lot of questions and also bear the efficiency and craftsmanship of the artisans in Early India.

Area and the period of the study:

Western Deccan comprises of modern day Maharashtra, parts of Gujrat and northern Karnataka and is bounded by Arabian Sea in the west, Narmada in North and Krishna in South. This western Deccan was ruled by several dynasties like Satavahanas, Bhojas, Traikutas, the Kalachuris (early), the Early Rashtrakutas, and the Mauryas in early period (Dhavalikar, 2003). According to Himanshu Prabha Ray the second urbanization in Gangetic plain gradually and horizontally expanded towards the other region and reached western Deccan in between 1st century BC to 3rd century AD. This period also saw increased importance of trade and other artisanal activity and politically marked by the rule of Satavahana (Ray, 1987) This is also the region which includes the largest number of rock-cut caves in India associated with different religion, though mostly Buddhism. Though plenty of works have been done on rock-cut caves of this region,-the focus was mostly on a particular cave site. Yet presence of large number of caves continued for such a long period indicates the importance of this region as a whole. As the distribution and the period when this tradition was prevailed in Western Deccan is striking in comparison to other regions and raise more questions. The Area of the study would be western Deccan comprising of Maharashtra and certain parts of Gujrat. The period will be from 2nd century B.C., as this is the time of earliest rock-cut cave in Bhaja and Ajanta, and will be up to 9th century A.D., the last phase of cave temples in Ellora.

Aims and objective:

The aim of this study is to give an idea of rock-cut caves of the said period of Western Deccan with special reference to the social dimension of these caves. The objective is to understand the reasons which led to the making of this kind of architecture–purpose, especially in this area. It is clear that for long 1000 years, all these rock-cut caves continued in this region, without any striking break, or without any noteworthy changes in architecture. Himanshu Prabha Ray and Kathleen D. Morison mentioned that there was a close relationship between port settlements and Buddhist Monastic establishment (Ray, 1987) (Morison, 1995). The western Deccan also played an important role as the series of ports like Sopara, Kalyan and Chaul were located here. The presence of Kanheri near Chaul also answers the association of trade routes and these monasteries. Yet the question remains, in spite of being an important trade centre why they followed the same architectural pattern for centuries. Trade centres has been always a place of cultural mingling and exchange of customs. Then why in this region they neither influenced by other style nor they tried to experiment with other architectural pattern. It is clear that these cave temples indeed influenced other ruler like Pallavas and western Chalukyas, and their earliest religious architecture was cave temple. But both of them changed the style within a century, then what was the reason behind the continuation of rock-cut caves in western Deccan for such a long period.

These rock-cut caves were not related only with religion. These caves had another social aspect, beside the economical one. These caves are believed to be inhabited by monks, or ascetic of different religion. But the small donatives inscriptions found from the several caves indicate they were mostly either donated by merchants or by relatives or wife of a king/warrior or of a common man. Even in Bhaja a ploughman's wife also mentioned for donating Bodhi (Burgess and Indraji, 1976). The interesting part is the name and the designation of these people indicates the humble prayer of common people. But these majestic establishments on the other hand indicate the use of labour and expanse under a central authority, probably a royal patronage. It also indicates a planned, experienced and skilful craftsmanship of a group of artisans under the supervision of some expert architect. These large numbers of caves and their distribution within western Deccan also raised another important question and what role they played behind the creation of these rock-cut caves. From the above observations the questions arise are:

- What make this region so important for making of these rock-cut caves?
- Why these rock-cut caves were continued in spite of being situated in trade centres without any significant change in the mode of architecture?
- The contribution, role and involvement of the artisans in making of the caves?
- Why they did not distribute this architectural style, or in other hand did not accept the concept of structural temples largely?

Methodology:

The methodology for this study will be critical and analytical. Survey of the rock-cut caves in Maharashtra, with special emphasis on their location, sculptural and architectural similarities and dissimilarities. Through field survey of the rock-cut caves in Maharashtra the primary data will be collected. This primary data will be analysed in corroboration with published secondary data.

There are also some limitations to this study; first of all there is abundance of caves in the whole of Maharashtra region. In a stipulated time bound research that will be practical problem; hence a survey will be conducted at first to identify samples for focused study. The similarities or dissimilarities will be identified through the study of selected caves with critical and analytical viewpoints then generalization will be made.

Literature review:

There are several works done by renowned scholars and historians about the rock-cut cave of Maharashtra. But they are in general done either in terms of religion or in terms of Architecture, but mostly on the basis of a single site like Ajanta, Ellora etc. Most of the earlier works were though concerned about the rock-cut caves in India. The Earliest among them is '*The Cave Temples of India*' by James Fergusson and James Burgess in 1880. There he discussed Cave temples on the basis of two broad divisions; Eastern India and Western

Indian cave temples. Their work is limited to description of architecture and imperialistic mode of interpretations to justify the cave temple at the beginning.

Another notable work in this field is '*Buddhist Monuments*' by Debala Mitra in 1971. There she discussed Buddhist monuments on the basis of region or state. She also gave a detailed description of the Buddha's life written in different sources and identifying the name of the places with modern location or name. Then she writes about Buddhist monuments corroborating it with sources and gave a description of historical facts with archaeological remains. This is basically a narrative of primary sources with the help of archaeological remains.

In 1975 Owen C. Kail in his book '*Buddhist Cave Temples of India*' described historicity of Buddha followed by the Asoka's contribution in architecture. He then described in detail the growth and developments of Buddhist architecture and religion simultaneously. Finally gave a detailed description of Chaityas in Central India, Kathiawar and Konkan area. These are some of the many works concerning cave temples of India in General, or as Buddhist monuments.

There is another way of looking into the Cave temples of India or in this matter, in Maharashtra with particular focus on sites with group of cave temples like, Ajanta, Ellora, Kanheri etc. Paintings of Ajanta were always an interesting and attractive subject for the scholars. Major Robert Gill copied paintings of Ajanta. In 1930 under the authority of Nizam G.Yazdani produced series of books named '*Ajanta: The colour and monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta Frescos Based on Photography'.* These are the some of the earliest work on Ajanta Fresco.

There are several scholars who are working on the several aspects and features of the Ajanta. . Apart from the report in 1883 'Elura cave temples' by James Burgess and '*The Rock Cut-caves of Pitalkhora in the Deccan*' published in Ancient India by M. N. Despande in 1959 there are several works on a particular cave temples sites like Ajanta, Ellora.

'*The Ajanta Caves: Artistic Wonder of Ancient Buddhist India'* by Benoy k. Behl is a noteworthy work on Ajanta published in 1998. '*Ellora, Concept and Style*' by Carmel Barkson in 1992 and 'Ellora' by M.K. Dhavlikar in 2003 are some works on Ellora as whole.

Walter M. Spink has done elaborate research work in Ajanta and published '*Ajanta: History and Development'* in five volume within 2005 to 2009 with the different aspects in each volume respectively are; 'The End Of The Golden Age', 'Arguments About Ajunta', 'The Arrival Of The Uninvited', 'Year By Year', 'Cave By Cave'. He also published several articles focusing on a particular feature or aspect of Ajanta .

In 2012, '*Carving Devotion in the Jain Caves at Ellora'* by Lisa Owen is another work where she reconstructed Jain artistic and devotional practice at the Ellora. These are some works of many done on the rock-cut cave temples of Maharashtra or Deccan in reference to particular sites.

There is also works on rock-cut caves in western Deccan in relation to their importance and contribution in different factors. In 1987 Himanshu Prabha Ray tried to show the urbanization and the change of ideology of Buddhist monastery focusing on the western Deccan in '*Early Historical Urbanization: In the Case of western Deccan*'.

In1995, Kathleen D. Morrison published '*Trade, Urbanism, and Agricultural Expansion: Buddhist Monastic Institutions and the State in the Early Historic Western Deccan*', here he tried to link Buddhism, trade and state, especially in Satavahana period, in relation with the rock-cut architecture in western Deccan.

In 2011,by showing number of rock-cut shrines, not only cave temples, which are unfinished and unexplained by historical circumstances Vidya Dehejia and Peter Rockwell propose in '*A Flexible Concept of Finish: Rock-Cut Shrines in Premodern India'* that there was a "flexible" concept of finish for rock-cut monuments in premodern India.

These are some of the works which are not directly concerned with the art and architecture of the Cave temples but tried to connect them with the contemporary polity and society. There are several works in this field from different perspective and with different viewpoints. These are some of the earlier and recent works relevant to the proposed research.

Tentative Chapterization:

The tentative Chapterization for this proposed study is given below.

- Content:
- List of illustrations:
- Chapter –I: Introduction
- Chapter – II: Historical background- Sramana tradition and the growth of rock-Architecture.
- Chapter – III: Form Features and Function of Art.
- Chapter- IV: Relation of interdependence: monks, monarchs, money lenders, masons
- Chapter – V: Conclusions.
- Appendix:
- Illustrations:
- Bibliography:

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